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Letter dated 7 September 2005 from the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that, under the presidency of the Philippines, the Security Council is scheduled to have a debate on the subject "The role of civil society in conflict prevention and the pacific settlement of disputes" on Tuesday, 20 September 2005.

The presidency has prepared a non-paper to help guide the discussion on this subject (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Lauro L. **Baja**, Jr.
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 7 September 2005 from the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The role of civil society in conflict prevention and the pacific settlement of disputes

Concept paper

Opportunities and challenges for cooperation

The Security Council plays a vital role in preventing disputes, preventing existing disputes from further escalating into conflicts and resolving conflicts if and when they occur. The upsurge of threats to international peace constrains the Security Council to act in tandem with other governments, relevant non-governmental and civil society organizations, the private sector, the academe and other actors and stakeholders in order to effectively discharge its role to preserve global peace.

A key goal contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration is "to give greater opportunities to the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society, in general, to contribute to the realization of the Organization's goals and programmes", which include, in particular, the maintenance of international peace and security.

Non-governmental organizations, civil society, local authorities and the private sector can make positive contributions in the promotion and implementation of development, security and human rights programmes, and it is important that they be engaged with Governments, the United Nations and other international organizations in these key areas.

Article 33, paragraph 1, of the Charter of the United Nations provides that the parties to any dispute shall first of all seek a peaceful solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means of their choice. This provision opens a window of opportunity for concerned Governments to consider availing themselves of programmes initiated by civil society to help promote understanding and peace through dialogue and cooperation.

Coordination and collaboration with civil society groups

While it is true that preventing a dispute from turning into armed confrontation is basically political in nature, parallel social and related processes can support the peace process. Coordination with civil society organizations in the peaceful settlement of disputes is beneficial and necessary, given their strength as neutral actors whose knowledge, abilities, experience, links with key constituencies, influence and resources contribute greatly to creating confidence among parties concerned.

They can operate in parallel with governmental and intergovernmental activities, complementing each other as stakeholders in the quest for peace and in building mutual understanding. Specific sectors of civil society that can be tapped to

assist parties in the search for peaceful solution to disputes, tensions and frictions are the academe, NGOs dedicated to conflict prevention, and the religious sector.

The academe is useful in organizing confidence-building activities, such as workshops and forums with the participation of parties to a dispute to examine from an academic perspective the internal, bilateral and regional implications of disputes and the benefits of a peaceful solution.

Religious and spiritual groups represent another important sector of civil society and deserve greater attention because of their important linkages in society. As confirmed by the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations "(t)hese groups provide powerful community leadership, shape public opinion, provide advice on ethical matters, facilitate reconciliation between conflicting communities and identify the needs of vulnerable groups."

In the light of the above, the public debate may address the following questions:

- How can the Security Council harness the actual and potential contributions and roles of non-governmental and civil society organizations in the development of a strategy for comprehensive conflict prevention and the pacific settlement of disputes in line with Chapter VI of the Charter?
- How can the Security Council and non-governmental and civil society organizations collaborate in the overall conflict prevention strategies as well as in various phases or stages of dispute settlement?
- How can the Security Council mobilize the non-governmental and civil society organizations to play a more active role in pursuit of "other peaceful means" to settle disputes, such as by encouraging informal dialogues and contacts between and among parties or constituencies of parties to disputes?
- In addition to existing mechanisms (e.g., the Arria formula), what cooperative framework could be fostered in order for the Security Council and non-governmental and civil society organizations to have a smooth working relationship to safeguard international peace and security?